

Democrats also used economic pressures against their targets. The city's leading businessmen contended that "the substitution of white for negro labor" would solve many of the city's problems. These men needed the political contest to be over so they could return to business. The unsettled situation was seen as "detrimental to every business interest" because of the impact upon business and capital recruitment for the city.<sup>51</sup> At the beginning of October, the chamber of commerce met and passed resolutions requiring members to

---

jobs available, men had to resort to crime in order to feed themselves and their families. Former chief of police Melton answered a series of questions in 1899 regarding the arson problems faced by the city and replied that the arson cases were well before the beginning of the white supremacy election campaign and that the "firebugs" had been arrested. Melton observed that during the spring and summer months when residents were out of the city at vacation homes on the beach, crime at those residences increased annually and was usually instances of young boys breaking and entering to steal minor items. James Worth wrote his wife before the election that a black man had approached his house and asked his mother for something to eat since he had eaten nothing for two days. Another letter writer, Mrs. Edward Wootten, informed her son that blacks had been "robbing pantries." James Worth to Josephine, November 3, 1898, James S. Worth Papers, Southern Historical Collection; Mother to Edward Wootten, November 8, 1898, Wootten Papers, University of North Carolina at Wilmington; *Contested Election Case*, 369-70.

<sup>51</sup> It is clear that after the city returned to Democratic control business leaders were successful in a variety of business ventures. The Delgado Mill began construction in 1899, the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad located its headquarters in the city and other businesses grew as well. The turn of the century was a period of prosperity for businessmen throughout the country, Wilmington's business leaders were not able to capitalize on the wealth being accumulated by railroad and industry magnates until after 1898. Review of industrial schedules from the 1890 and 1900 census plus business directories and port records demonstrates the growth seen in the city following 1898 as businessmen focused on business and not politics. *Wilmington Messenger*, November 2, 1898.

"exert . . . utmost influence and personal effort to effect results which will restore order" and protect property and lives. As a result, the Merchant's Association met on October 7 and developed a plan for the establishment of a "permanent labor bureau for the purpose of procuring white labor for employers." The group agreed to meet on a weekly basis and promised that their mission to hire more white men would not falter after the election.<sup>52</sup> For their part, the city's white laborers pressured leaders to acknowledge their economic plight and organized a White Laborer's Union to ensure their needs would be addressed once the Democrats regained power. At the end of October about 35 laborers organized the union. They elected Red Shirt Mike Dowling chair, and stated that their purpose was to "organize a white laborer's union with a view to replacing negro labor with white labor and with this object in view to co-operate with the Wilmington Labor Bureau recently organized as a result of the meeting of the business men and tax payers of Wilmington."<sup>53</sup>

#### *Vigilance Committees and Paramilitary Organization*

Another component of the Wilmington campaign, and apparently unique to the city, was the development of a "Vigilance Committee," which was under an additional umbrella of the militia-like organization led by Roger Moore and attributed to the Secret Nine. Also called the "Citizen's Patrol," the Vigilance Committee attempted to pull the Red Shirts and White Government Unions under their control.

---

<sup>52</sup> *Evening Dispatch* (Wilmington), October 8, 1898.

<sup>53</sup> C. C. Redd, George W. Cameron, D. A. Rowan, C. W. Millis and M. G. Silva were appointed by those present to draw up a constitution and by-laws before the next meeting. *Wilmington Messenger*, October 28, 1898.